

# Reasons to be Optimistic

By Harold Browning



“Reason for Optimism” was the theme of the educational session at the June 11–13 Florida Citrus Industry Annual Conference in Bonita Springs. This session was presented on Thursday morning to a packed house at the conference, highlighting topics of greatest interest and providing both a research update and a grower perspective. It seems that with the growing issue with HLB in Florida, the timetable for solutions is growing shorter. Acknowledging that scenario, the program really focused down on two main themes — those that are repeated often in today’s discussions. These themes were therapies for existing infected trees, and protecting new plantings and new plants from HLB loss. There are many other things to talk about, and thus the conference serves a useful purpose in allowing participants to discuss one-on-one and in groups of various sizes those issues of greatest importance to them.

Back at the educational seminar, the audience heard an update from Tom Turpen, program manager from CRDF, where he highlighted the different antimicrobial strategies that are being pursued to test and move to regulatory consideration a range of chemicals that can reduce *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* (CLAs) titer. First tests always are in lab or greenhouse, but Tom described how these materials are being formulated for uptake into citrus trees, and are being organized into field trials to learn how they really work. To emphasize the critical need, Tom Jerkins from Premier Citrus provided his thoughts on how vital these materials are to stabilize the economics of the industry, ending his comments by leading the audience in a chant, “We need antimicrobials...NOW.”

An update on thermal therapy implementation in the grove was provided by Dr. Reza Ehsani of UF/IFAS, and he provided an update on progress with supplemental heat since the April Field Day. He is lining up growers to test his steam application treatments to reduce CLAs titer, and learning more about the dynamics of applying quick treatment, high temperature to citrus trees and canopies. Evaluation following treatments is fine-tuning the conditions of treatment that will make this tool more effective and less likely to damage plant material.

Following this overview, Rex Clonts, a Lake County grower, discussed his plans for using tree enclosures to capture solar energy to treat larger trees. This demonstrates the initiative being shown by growers to develop their own solutions and test them in the field, and most importantly, to share their experiences with others.

The final segment of the seminar focused on solutions to be applied to new plantings and resets. Dr. Jude Grosser presented an energetic overview of tolerant rootstocks that are being moved through field evaluation, and highlighted advances in scion breeding as well that may lead to HLB-resistance or tolerance.

Capping off the seminar was a presentation by Rob Atchley of Duda, who provided an overview of the company’s approach to replanting and the rationale for replanting at this time. He also highlighted the aggressive incorporation of all of the elements of new groves, irrigation/nutrition, mechanization and ACP and HLB management. His presentation definitively answered why Duda is planting new groves at this time.

With additional funding being made available to keep moving HLB programs forward, there is indeed reason for optimism!

*Harold Browning is Chief Operations Officer of CRDF. The foundation is charged with funding citrus research and getting the results of that research to use in the grove.*

